

SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

For Those who Reason

*Light is the task
when many share the toil.*



July 2003

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The Flight of the Bee

The bees make their hives at one place, but often have to travel many miles to other places to suck the nectar from the flowers. Sometimes they have to keep flying the whole day in order to do so, and observation of the bees has shown that when they leave home in the early morning, it is still dark, but that when they set off home in the evening, the sun has not yet set and it is still light. To leave in the morning darkness and return in the evening light is a very practical thing to do, because travelling in the morning means moving from dark to light while travelling in the evening means moving from light to dark. The bee takes into account the time-span between its arrival and departure and makes its journeys accordingly. It knows that it can travel to distant parts without losing its way provided it does so in the daylight, but it can start its journey in darkness because it knows that daylight is not far away. Similarly, it avoids the possibility of going astray in the dark by being as close as possible to its hive in the evening when darkness is about to fall, so it sets off on its last journey home while it is still light.

Nature teaches us a lesson through the bees. It shows us that each of our steps should be based on realities and not on wishful thinking or vague suppositions. The future will, of necessity, have its moments of darkness as well as its moments of light. If we fail to note the significance of this difference and begin our journeys in ignorance and without forethought, the future will hold little that is bright for us. Moments of light and dark will come according to their own set course, and not as a result of our wishful thinking. If we do not pay heed to the realities of existence and plan our lives accordingly, we shall have the illusion that we are heading towards a bright future and splendid results, whereas, when the next moment of darkness arrives, we shall discover that, all along, we had been heading towards darkness.

Keeping Calm in the Face of Adversity

When Napoleon Buonaparte (1769-1821) escaped from the Island of Elba after his first term of imprisonment, he was accompanied only by a small group of loyal soldiers. Once dethroned, he now again aspired to the throne of France. But in the very first encounter, he found himself face to face with 20,000 French soldiers.

Napoleon, although considered one of the most courageous leaders the world has known, avoided a direct confrontation with his opponents. He did not make the mistake of foolishly ignoring his own military weakness. At the crucial moment, when he and his little band of men stood face to face with this enormous army, he stepped forward, completely unarmed and stood calmly before his enemies. Then with great composure he unbuttoned his coat and bared his chest. In a voice now charged with emotion he addressed the great throng of soldiers many of whom had served under him in the past: "Which one of you is willing to fire at the naked chest of his father?" The battlefield rang with shouts of 'No one!' Almost all of the soldiers belonging to the enemy camp rushed to the side of Napolean, who emerged victorious and once more ascended the throne of France. If, in the destitute state he was in at that time, he had attempted to do battle with the French army, he would surely have been slaughtered on that very battlefield.

Whatever a man's resources, if he has to deal effectively with a situation, he must be able to make a proper assessment of it. And this he will not be able to do if he panics in the face of danger. It is only if he does not lose his nerve and keeps his mind open to what is practical that he will be able to overcome the obstacles in his path. Inevitably, his success depends upon his being able to make a well-considered choice of whatever material and mental resources are available to him and then putting them to proper use. History abounds in instances of the weak overcoming the strong, simply by strategic deployments of resources. The reason for such success is not far to seek: often the enemy is not as strong as he appears to be. Everyone has his Achilles heel. It is just a question of finding it and then ruthlessly exploiting it. Just as Napoleen exploited the French troops' old and sentimental loyalty to himself that being his only mainstay so can ordinary individuals take advantage of their enemies' vulnerability in order to gain their point without the kind of confrontation which could be disastrous to both sides.

Seeking the Right Alternatives

A luckless passenger rushed, panting, into the station just as his train was steaming out. His watch unaccountably slow by ten minutes had let him down. "Don't worry, Babuji," sympathised a passing porter, "there will be another train along in about a couple of hours. Why go away? Just wait here for it on this same platform." The passenger, keen to reach his destination, decided to accept his advice, even if it meant waiting two, long tedious hours. Just getting to where he wanted to go was too important to him to think of expending time and energy coming and going from the station all over again, and perhaps missing his train once again, so he stayed right where he was and catch his train he did.

When we miss a train, there is always the comforting knowledge that there is that next train coming along. That is the lesson that the platform teaches. It is then up to us to make the correct decision about our next move. But it is surprising how many people fail to grasp this reality. They are inexplicably plunged into gloom and depression when they fail initially to grasp an opportunity, and frequently adopt such a pessimistic attitude that they fritter away their precious energies in blaming others for their failures. How much better it would be if they were to make a proper assessment of the situation, taking all possibilities into account, and then seek new ways and means of achieving their goals, even if it means a lengthy wait. This is a matter simply of patience and determination. There is always that "next train" for them to catch. It is just a question of being properly alert to this, and being ready to avail of that God-given second opportunity.

If, in any given situation, someone with whom you have business or personal relations turns hostile, pursuing a policy of open confrontation seldom reaps rewards. It is almost invariably more politic to extend courtesy, love and sympathy. That is the way to a person's heart. It is only by pursuing such a course that a formidable foe may be transformed into a faithful friend.

Suppose you work in an office and, for reasons which you fail to comprehend, you are dismissed. In such a situation, if initial attempts to clear your name and have yourself honourably reinstated come to naught, it is seldom worthwhile persisting in your efforts. It is far better to wash your hands of the whole situation and try to break new ground elsewhere. That way you can sometimes do even better than before.

Often when someone does not pay you your dues, your first inclination is to enter into legal battles with him, or wage a relentless psychological war on him. Either course should be eschewed, for the net result is generally wasted time and money. Years can go by without your receiving anything in return for a great deal of energy spent. No, it is better to ignore the injustice done to you, and to put your trust in hard work to get what you want out of life. It is perfectly possible that, through sheer diligence, you will succeed in achieving all those things you wanted others to give you as a matter of right.

Most personal problems are the result of a limited outlook on life. If people were to broaden their perspectives, they would soon realize that there are many different ways of approaching the same problem. It would, above all, become clear to them that things which are impossible to obtain by direct confrontation can be achieved by the patient fostering of mutual goodwill. Where provocation and retaliation have failed, patience and human concern will succeed.

God's Signs

Your Lord is God, who created the skies and the earth in six periods, then ascended His Throne. He throws the veil of night over day. Swiftly they follow one another. The sun, moon and stars are subservient to His command. His is the creation, His is the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of the worlds. Call on your Lord humbly and secretly; He does not love the transgressors. Do not bring corruption to the land after things have been set right. Pray to Him fearfully, eagerly. God's mercy is within reach of the righteous. He sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy till, when they bear a heavy cloud, We drive it to a dead land and cause rain to descend thereon, bringing forth all manner of fruit. Thus We will raise the dead to life; perchance you will take heed. And as for the good land, its vegetation comes forth by the leave of its Lord. But poor and scant are the fruits which spring from barren soil. Thus We make plain Our signs for those who render thanks (7:54-58).

Whenever the Prophet has to choose between two courses, he would always opt for the easier course.

In Heaven and on Earth

So glory be to God morning and evening. Praise be to Him in the heavens and on earth, at twilight and at noon. He brings forth the living from the dead, and the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after it is dead. Likewise you shall be raised to life. And by one of His signs He created you from dust; now behold you are human beings, ranging widely. And by another of His signs He created for you, of yourselves, spouses that you might find repose in them and has planted love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for people who reflect. Among His other signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variety of your tongues and hues. Surely there are signs in this for those who know. And by another of His signs is your slumbering by night and your seeking of His bounty by day. Surely in that are signs for those who hear. The lightning which He shows you to inspire fear and hope is yet another of His signs. He sends down water from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after it is dead. Surely in this there are signs for a people who understand. The heavens and the earth are firm by His command; then when He calls you, suddenly, from the earth you shall emerge. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and on earth; all are obedient to Him. He it is who originates creation, then reproduces it, and it is easier for Him. His is the loftiest attribute in heaven and on earth. He is the Mighty, the Wise One. (30:17-27).

The Cosmic Call

It is God who splits the grain and the date stone. He brings forth the living from the dead, and the dead from the living. Such is God. How then can you turn away from Him? He splits the sky into dawn. He has made the night for repose and the sun and the moon for reckoning. Such is the ordinance of God, the Mighty, the Wise. It is He who has created for you the stars, so that you may be guided by them in the darkness by land and sea. We have made plain our signs for people who understand. It is He who sent down water from the sky. With it We bring forth the shoot of every plant and then We have brought forth its green leaf and from it close-compounded grain; and out of the date-palm, from its pollen, dates thick-clustered, ready to the hand; and gardens of grapes, olives and pomegranates, like and unlike one another. Look upon their fruits when they fructify and ripen. Surely in all this are signs for people who believe. Yet they ascribe as partners to Him the jinn, though He created them, and they impute to Him sons and daughters without any knowledge. Glory be to Him and exalted be He above what they describe. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. How can He have a son, when there is for Him no consort; when He created all things and He has knowledge of all things? (6:96-104).

Beware of Negative Thinking

The greatest weakness of present-day Muslims is their negative psychology. They feel that all the nations of the world are inimical to them, and so many of their activities are seen as acts of hostility against the Muslims. This negative psychology has resulted in all their thinking becoming unrealistic. Suppose you are hit on the head by a ripe piece of fruit which has fallen down from a tree. If you persist in thinking that the tree has maliciously thrown it down at you, you will never succeed in either identifying the problem or in solving it.

The U.S.A., for instance, takes the side of the Israeli Jews against the Palestinian Muslims. All over the world, Muslims see this as an expression of enmity towards themselves. But nothing could be further from the truth. In this world of vested interests, America sides with Israel, because its own economic interests are at stake there. It has nothing to do with being an enemy of the Muslims.

By helping Israel, America makes a two-fold gain. Firstly, it can in this way keep the oil-producing countries under continuous pressure, so that they are left with no choice but to come to terms with American conditions at the negotiating table. Secondly, benefits definitely accrue to America in the realm of finance. The most lucrative business of the developed countries is the granting of "aid" to the weaker and the developing countries, and the receiving of interest

on the amounts loaned. The actual amount to be repaid is in easy installments, but the payment of interest has to be made in full each year. Such loans are granted for various kinds of development work, but the major share of it goes towards buying modern military equipment, which is a highly profitable affair for the U.S.A., it being the chief supplier. The perpetual state of war between the Arabs and Israel is excellent for American business because, they can then sell costly weapons to Israel against loans, and receive in return huge amounts of interest. According to a recent report, the amount of loan interest that Israel repays to America is of the order of 910 million dollars a year. And the money paid out for the costly weapons that the Arabs buy from America is over and above what Israel pays the U.S.A.

Before indulging in negative thinking, Muslims should consider that, in diplomacy, there are no real friends or enemies. There are only economic interests.

Constructive Temperament

Dr. Abdul Jalil of New Delhi, once had the opportunity to visit Japan in 1970, where he stayed for six months. He later recounted an incident to me which cast a significant light on the Japanese character. It seems that during his stay in Tokyo, he would often take a 15 minute ride on a suburban train to a place just outside the city. One day, when the fifteen minutes had passed and there was no sign of his station, he began to feel uneasy. Sure enough, when the train stopped, it was at some other station, and he realized that somehow or the other he had boarded the wrong train at Tokyo. In some agitation he tried to get help from the Japanese who was sitting next to him, but since neither could speak the others language, conversation was impossible. Dr Jalil then thought of writing down the name of his station in block capitals and showing it to his travelling companion. The Japanese could apparently read that much and promptly pulled the communication cord to stop the train, which had just begun to move out of the station. He hurried Dr. Jalil off the train and took him to another platform which was for trains going in the opposite direction. There he put Dr. Jalil on the right train, and, in spite of the fact that no conversation was possible, insisted on accompanying him to his destination. Only then did he take his leave and go off to board another train which would take him on his way.

Another incident he recounted was that of a car accident which he witnessed himself as he walked along the pavements of Tokyo. Two cars, both driven by Japanese, had collided. The two drivers immediately got out of their cars and stood facing each other with heads bowed. Both said: "It's my fault. Please, forgive me."

Only people with a constructive temperament could behave in such a self-abnegating way. A temperament such as this is a major guarantee of a nation's success. By contrast, individuals who care for nothing but their own selfish interests can neither achieve personal success, nor can they make any contribution to the building of their nation.

Perseverance Pays

Waking up in the morning to the noisy chirruping of the birds, the man noticed a broken egg lying on the ground. It had obviously fallen from a nest built by sparrows just under the ceiling of his modest dwelling. Wearily he removed the broken egg, then, noting with disgust the straws which were eternally littering his floor, he stood up on a piece of furniture, and swiped the nest out of its niche. Then he spent quite some time and effort cleaning up the whole place.

The very next day, he found more straws dirtying his newly cleaned floor and, looking up, he saw that the birds were again building their nest under his roof. He felt he was going mad with their chirruping and the perpetual mess they made, so he destroyed the new nest before it was even half-completed. That way he thought he could drive them away forever.

But the tragedy of the devastated nest only spurred the birds on to greater efforts, and showing great daring, they worked faster than ever. They did not waste a single moment on lamenting their loss. Nor did they go away to collect a whole flock of birds to come and make a united attack on the house owner. They simply flew to and from the home, quietly and incessantly picking up fresh straws and fixing them in position. They did not waste a single moment.

This self-same story was repeated from day to day for over a month. The house owner would angrily destroy their home and moments later the sparrows would reappear with straws in their beaks to begin their labour all over again. Their efforts seemed fruitless. Their incessant gathering of straws was apparently futile. But regardless of consequences, they went on steadily with their work. It was the birds' answer to the unmitigated hatred of the man. Yet

although he was the stronger, they always seemed somehow to foil him. And, finally their silent endeavours gained the upper hand. The man realized that his resistance was futile and he stopped destroying the nests. Now they have completed their nest and have successfully laid and hatched their eggs. Their chirruping no longer incenses the man. He has simply ceased to mind them, for they have taught him a priceless lesson never hate your enemy. In all circumstances, persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end you will emerge victorious.

Making the Extra Effort

Lee Iacocca was born in 1924 to a poor family who had left their home-town in Italy for America in search of a livelihood. Iacocca worked hard at his studies and secured a master's degree in engineering, after which he took a job in the Ford Motor Company, where he continued to rise until he became its President. Later, following some disagreement with Henry Ford II, he was asked to leave the Ford Company in 1978.

Iacocca then got a job in another motor company, the Chrysler Corporation, as its President. This company had gone bankrupt at the time he joined it, running at a loss of almost \$ 160 million. He made a proper assessment of the situation, then began to work really hard at improving matters. Within three years he had not only paid back all loans, but was running the company at a profit. Now he takes pride in saying, "I'm the company."

Iacocca subsequently wrote his auto biography which contains many valuable suggestions, based on his experiences, such as "The key to success is not information. It's people. And the kind of people I look for to fill top management posts are the eager beavers. These are the guys who try to do more than they are expected to."

Doing more than is expected of one is the way of sincere and active people. Those who work in this way will surely have greater success in life than they ever expected.

Big-Heartedness

The first Umayyad Caliph, Mu'awiya, was ruling in Damascus. Most of the eastern Byzantine empire had been conquered by Islam. The Caesar had been forced to withdraw to Constantinople, and hold out there. Yet he made incursions into Muslim territory. In one clash the Romans imprisoned some Muslims, one of whom was a man belonging to the Quraysh. When the Caesar learnt of this, he asked for the captives to be brought before him.

The Muslim captives were brought into the Caesar's court with their hands tied and feet in chains. The emperor addressed them disparagingly. "The punishment for such as you will be a slow death. It will be a lesson to you and your compatriotes to stop encroaching upon our territory."

The emperor's words wounded the Qurayshi's sense of honour, and he answered back in a severe tone. "As long as you remain an enemy of Islam," he said, "there will be no peace between us. The price of our blood is a cheap one to pay for death in the path of God. But how precious our blood becomes when it is spilled by a worthless ruler like you."

A patriarch of the Caesar's court became incensed on hearing the Qurayshi's words. He came up and hit the Muslim captive on both sides of the face. The Qurayshi's hands being tied, he could offer no resistance. What he did was cry out in a loud voice: "Mu'awiya, where are you now? Are you not going to take revenge on these dastardly people who have stricken a man of noble birth from your own household?" Then he looked towards the patriarch. "I swear by God that there will come a day when you will realize who I am."

Mu'awiya was greatly aggrieved when news of this incident reached Damascus. He resolved to do something to make amends for what had happened. First of all, he arranged an exchange of prisoners with the Byzantine emperor. So great was his determination to secure the release of his men that he agreed to free a greater number of Roman soldiers in exchange for them.

Once the captives had returned home, Mu'awiya surreptitiously hatched a plot. He obtained the services of a man of Syria, a merchant who knew the Roman language. Mu'awiya gave him a great quantity of gold and money, charging him with the task of arresting the patriarch and bringing him to Damascus.

The Syrian travelled as a merchant from Damascus to Constantinople. Before long he had established the identity of the patriarch and made friends with him, wooing him with gifts of perfumes, jewels, silk and other such precious items. The Syrian made several trips between the two cities, bringing the patriarch gifts each time. The whole operation

was conducted in the utmost secrecy, with no one learning of it save Mu'awiya, and the merchant himself.

A lengthy period elapsed. Contacts between the two men became so close that the patriarch requested certain specific gifts, which the Syrian promised to bring. On his return to Damascus, he purchased a swift camel and, along with a camel driver, brought it to a place near Constantinople. He himself went on to meet the patriarch. "I have brought all your gifts," he told the Roman, "let's go and collect them." Thus he contrived to take the patriarch to where the camel and his companion were waiting. There both men caught hold of him, tied his hands and feet and, setting him upon the camel, set off towards Damascus.

In this way the patriarch was brought before Mu'awiya. The caliph called a large meeting, to which the captive was also summoned. The Qurayshi who had been struck by the Byzantine courtier was astonished to see his antagonist appear from behind a curtain. "Cousin," Mu'awiya said to his fellow Qurayshi, "now is the time for you to be thankful to this Syrian. He has done exactly as I told him to, without the slightest omission. His efforts have enabled you to extract your right from the patriarch, without wronging him."

"If I had not sworn an oath," said the Qurayshi, "I would have forgiven him." Raising his hand, he struck the patriarch once. "That suffices," he said. "I am pardoning him what remains to be done by way of punishment."

"You are our guest for three days," Mu'awiya told the patriarch. When the three days were over, he was allowed to return to Constantinople, along with the Syrian and the presents he had been promised. Afterwards, all the Roman patriarchs gathered before the Caesar. They advised him not to mistreat Muslim prisoners from now on. "I have not seen any people as respectful, generous and good-natured as they are," said the patriarch who had been their guest. "If Mu'awiya had wanted to imprison me, he could have done so; but that was not his wish."

(*Al-Dawah*, Mecca, 14 Jamad al-Ula, 1405 AH)

Lord of the Great Throne

Did you think that We created you in vain and that you would never be returned to Us? Exalted be God, the true King. There is no God but He, the Lord of the great throne. And whoever invokes any other deity besides God a deity of whose divinity he has no proof with his Lord alone will be his reckoning. The unbelievers shall never prosper. And say: Lord, forgive and have mercy, for You are the best of those that show mercy (23:115-118).

Love for God

In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean with cargoes beneficial to men; in the water which God sends down from the sky and with which He revives the dead earth after its death, dispersing over it all kinds of beasts; in the swirling of the winds and in the clouds that are driven between earth and sky; surely in this there are signs for people who understand. Yet there are some people who choose from other beings besides God, as rivals to God, loving them as God alone should be loved whereas those who believe love God more than all else. If the evil-doers could only see, when they behold the doom, that power lies with God alone and that God is severe in punishment. When those who were followed disown their followers and they behold the doom, and their cords are cut asunder, those who followed will say, "If only a return were possible for us, we would disown them, as they have disowned us." Thus God will show them their own work as anguish for them. They shall never emerge from the Fire. Mankind, eat of what is in the earth lawful and wholesome, and do not follow in the steps of Satan, for he is your sworn enemy. He commands you only to evil and indecency and that you should assert about God what you do not know (2:164-169).

As seen during the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet adhered to the principle of peace even in extreme emergencies.

God's Prophets

Those who believe and have not tainted their belief with wrong-doing shall surely earn salvation for they follow the right path. Such was the argument with which We furnished Abraham against his people. We raise whom We will to an exalted rank. Your Lord is Wise, All-Knowing. And We gave to him Isaac and Jacob; each one We guided as We had guided Noah before them. Among his progeny were David and Solomon, Job and Joseph, Moses and Aaron; thus We reward those who do good. And Zachariah and John, Jesus and Elias; each was of the Righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha, Jonah and Lot, each one We preferred above all beings, as We exalted their fathers, their offspring and their brethren; We elected them and guided them to a straight Path. Such is God's guidance. He bestows it on whom He pleases of His servants. But if they had served other gods besides Him, their labours would have been in vain. On them We bestowed the scriptures, wisdom and prophethood. If these are disbelieved by this generation, then We shall entrust them to others who are not disbelievers. These are the ones whom God guided. Follow their guidance, and say: 'I ask no wage for it; it is but a reminder to all beings.' (6:82-90).

Muslim Journalism

The first generation of Muslims were moved by a sense of discovery. But present generation Muslims base their efforts on a feeling of loss. This is the basic reason for all the intellectual and ethical differences between latter-day Muslims and the original Islamic community.

For those became Muslims at the opening of the Islamic era, Islam was the greatest of blessings. But present-day Muslims have no such feeling for their faith. All they have is a feeling that other nations have taken away from them the political supremacy that Islamic history had granted them. It is for this reason that Muslims the world over are today suffering from a persecution complex. They look at other nations as oppressors and themselves as the oppressed. They hold different nations responsible for their problems in various parts of the world.

America, Israel, and Russia are variously the target of their anger and resentment. The Jews, Hindus, and Christians, are held responsible at different moments for their plight. Because of this attitude, all they have been able to achieve through their efforts has been futile protest.

This has also had an adverse effect on Muslim journalism. There is one thing common to the Muslim press the world over, and that is protest. All Muslim periodicals and newspapers today have adopted this tone. Their sole purpose is to put forward the Muslims' political case. But the true purpose of Muslim journalism should be to represent Islam; it should be run on the basis of principle, not on the basis of national prejudice.

If one represents a nation's case, one will spotlight its national issues. But to represent Islam, on the other hand, is to present God's religion before mankind. The Qur'an tells us how God sent countless prophets in ancient times, and revealed to them the scriptures. Man, however, was unable to preserve these scriptures in their original form. Then the final Prophet came to the world. The Book that was revealed to him would be preserved for all time. It is now our responsibility as Muslims to communicate this authentic book of divine guidance to all nations and all peoples of the world. True Muslim journalism is that which represents the message of Islam in this way.

A Practical Solution

"When one's ego is touched," an eminent psychologist once observed, "it turns into super-ego, and the result is breakdown." Much the same thing was said some thirteen hundred years back by 'Umair ibn Habib ibn Hamashah. During his last days this Companion of the Prophet Muhammad gave some advice to his grandson, Abu Ja'afar al-Khatmi, part of which was about patience. "One who does not bear with a small hurt from a foolish person will have to bear with great harm," was what he said.

The gist of both these remarks is the same, namely that the only way to avoid being harmed by others is to keep out of their firing line as much as possible, to keep as far away as one can from those who show themselves to be potentially harmful.

Every human being is born with an "ego". More often than not, that ego is dormant. It is better to leave it sleeping, for the ego can be like a snake which, when aroused, will harm all within its reach.

It is a commonplace in any society for one to be put out, and even aggrieved, as a result of someone else's foolishness or willful malice. Usually the best way of avoiding great harm from mischief-makers is to put up with initial hurt, for, if one does not, one will set off a chain reaction in which things will go from bad to worse. Instead of having to bear a relatively small hurt, one will be subjected to much greater suffering. And if one has not been able to bear a pelting with stones, how will one fare when great rocks descend upon one's head?

The Will to Unite

If an engine driver is to set his locomotive in motion, he has to stand before the fire and endure its fierce heat. This huge and complex machine, built up of so many parts, will remain immobile unless he is prepared to do so. The same goes for society. It will not function unless the individuals who have to make all its parts work are prepared to sacrifice something of their own and are ready to endure difficulties, if not actual hardship. And just as all the moving parts of a locomotive have to be kept regularly oiled, if they are not to be worn out with friction, thus bringing the machinery to a standstill, so tolerance must be a feature of society, if it is to function as a harmonious whole. Tolerance is the oil which will let the wheels go round. There can be no teamwork without it.

When people work together in groups, it is inevitable that there should be disagreements and that complaints should be voiced. However well-intentioned the individuals concerned may be, such negative feelings are bound to surface sooner or later. How is it possible then to work together in harmony? There is only one way, and that is to make a considered decision to remain united in the face of disagreement. It is a question of individuals being conscious of the necessity for harmony, and willing themselves to take complaints in their stride, if they are unjustified, and to start the process of self-examination, if the grounds for complaint have any validity in even the smallest measure. This is not asking for the impossible. Who does not do exactly this in his family life as a matter of good sense and practicality? When family members are living in close proximity, grievances do arise and tempers often flare up. But family cohesion is not destroyed because of this, for blood relationships prevent such feelings from getting out of hand. Grievances are swept away by mutual love, and tempers are cooled by words of regard and affection. And so the unity of the family remains intact. The home, indeed, is a microcosm of social existence. It provides a day-to-day working model of social harmony unflawed by grievances or disagreement.

The feelings of love which cement family life can be brought into being in social life through conscious deliberations. Unity can spring from a human awakening to its ultimate necessity.

Where family life is governed by the heart, social life is governed by the will. There is nothing that cannot be endured for the sake of unity, provided there is the will to achieve it.

Doing One's Bit

There was once a man who stubbornly refused to believe that it is God who provides for and nourishes his creatures. His friends did their best to make him understand this, but with no success. Finally, he decided to silence them by putting this notion to the test. Leaving his home early one morning, he went off to a jungle where he perched himself up in a tree. "If it is God who nourishes His servants, He will send me my food here too," he thought.

He sat in the tree the whole day, but there was no sign of any food. After going without breakfast, lunch and dinner, he was all the more convinced that such ideas were all nonsense. He was about to go home when he saw some wayfarers searching for a tree they could pass the night under. They finally chose the very tree in which he was perched. He decided not to reveal his presence and just watched what was going on at the base of the tree. After setting up their camp, they took themselves off to collect firewood, and having done this they, opened their bags and took out rice and pulses to cook a meal. When it was nearly ready, they threw a handful of chillies into the hot oil to season it. Such a spicy aroma rose up

into the air that the man in the tree sneezed. Only then did the travellers learn of his presence, whereupon they invited him to share what they had cooked.

The man happily went back home and said to his friends the next morning, "What you said was quite true. But you hadn't told me the whole story. Of course, God does provide you with food. It's just that you have to sneeze and come down a tree to get it!"

Although humorous in tone, this little anecdote is serious in intent. It is, in fact, a parable which underscores the notion that God helps those who help themselves. And although man's role is a very minor one, it is nevertheless a very necessary one. A man must prove his worth to have his due share of God's gifts. We must never, therefore, neglect to make ourselves deserving of God's nourishment.

The First Emigration

By the fifth year of the Prophet Muhammad's mission, conditions in Mecca had become intolerable for many of the Muslims, as persecution by the Quraysh intensified. At this time the Prophet advised his companions to emigrate to Abyssinia. This is called the first emigration of Islam; it preceded by some eighty years the mass emigration of Muslims to Medina.

This was part of the advice which the Prophet imparted to his followers on the occasion of the emigration to Abyssinia:

"Disperse in the land; surely God will gather you once again."

How meaningful these words of the Prophet are! What they amount to is an exhortation by the Prophet to his followers that they should avoid confronting the enemy for the present, but rather remove themselves from the line of fire. God would then provide them with the means to vanquish the enemy; He would gather them together so that they could come into their own once again.

Emigration is indeed a great test of patience. It is those who pass this test who will receive the reward of God. As the Prophet said: "You should know that succour comes with patience; there is ease with hardship."

Patience, then, is the ladder by which one ascends to the Lord's favour and succour. It is with patience that we should react to the difficulties of life, for it is on the field of human patience that divine succour descends. Our ability to face hardship with patience is a great portent, for it means that we are leaving our cause to God. That is a signal for the swift ending of our plight, and the conversion of our hardship into ease.

Real paradise lies on the other side of the divide of patience. Any paradise that one finds without crossing that divide can only be an illusion.

Heaven and Hell

They underrate the might of God. But on the Day of Resurrection He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and fold up the skies in His right hand. Glory be to Him! Exalted be He above all that they associate with Him. The Trumpet shall be blown and whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth shall swoon, save whom God wills. Then it shall be blown a second time and they will stand and look around them. The earth will shine with the light of its Lord and the Book will be set in place. The prophets and witnesses shall be brought in and all shall be judged with fairness: none shall be wronged. Each soul shall be paid in full for what it has wrought, for He is well-aware of what they do. Then the disbelievers will be driven into Hell in hordes. When they draw near, its gates will be opened, and its keepers will say to them: "Did not messengers come to you from among yourselves, reciting to you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this day?" They shall say: "Yes, indeed." And thus the punishment which the unbelievers have been promised shall be fulfilled. It shall be said: "Enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein forever." Evil is the dwelling-place of the arrogant. Then those who feared their Lord shall be led in bands into Paradise. When they draw near, its gates will be opened and its keepers shall say: "Peace be upon you! Well you have done. Enter Paradise and dwell therein forever." They will say: "Praise be to God, Who has been true to His promise to us and has made us inherit the land, that we may dwell wherever we wish in Paradise." Blessed is the reward of the righteous. And you will see the angels encircling about the Throne, hymning the praises of their Lord. Mankind will be judged with fairness and it will be said: "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds." (39:67-75)

Broken Pledges

Once a doctor was visited by a stranger who had a box with him. He sat in a corner waiting until all the patients had gone, and the doctor was left alone, then with an air of secrecy he opened up the box in front of the doctor. It contained a gold necklace. The stranger told him that this chain was worth Rs 10,000, but hastened to add that he did not want to sell it. He only wanted to borrow Rs 5000 against it. He had run into great difficulties and had felt forced to pawn something valuable. He said that he would be very grateful if the doctor could give him enough money to see him through this emergency. He promised to come back in one month's time and redeem the necklace. The doctor at first said that he was not interested, and refused to give him any money. But the man persisted, explaining his plight in such a piteous way that the doctor softened and agreed to help him out. He handed over the money, then locked the chain in his safe.

Month after month elapsed, but there was no sign of the man returning. The doctor began to feel apprehensive. Then one day he decided to take the necklace out of his safe and send it to a jeweller to have it valued, so that he could sell it. To his consternation he was told that it was made of brass. Although the doctor was shocked momentarily, it did not take him long to recover. He said that he had lost his money but that he would not lose his composure. He chose to forget all about this sad incident, and simply took the chain out of his safe and put it in a common almirah, along with other articles made of brass.

This attitude adopted by the doctor is the best solution to many problems that arise from our contacts with other people. Whenever our hopes and trusts have been betrayed, we feel that we have genuine grounds for feeling aggrieved. When a supposed man of principle proves a scoundrel, a well-wisher turns out an enemy and a reasonable person shows himself to be quite the reverse, we feel really let down.

On such occasions, the best policy is to bring those who have disappointed us down from the high pedestals that we had them on, and put them back among the commonplace. What had formerly been considered 'gold' should then be accepted as being only 'brass' and given a place accordingly. This is the only way to retain one's equanimity in the face of life's many disappointments.

Ethics and Technology

Soon after the completion of a multi-storeyed building called Akashdeep in Bombay, the whole construction collapsed. The engineers said that the reason for its collapse was that less cement had been used than specified by safety regulations.

In another statement the director of a technical institute said, "RCC construction is a scientific process which is excellent in the hands of qualified and experienced people, but dangerous if managed by incompetent engineers and contractors." *The Times of India*, 4 September, 1983)

This appears to be the correct and proper explanation of the matter, but if we really think about the word 'incompetent' as applied to the engineers and contractors concerned, we realize that it needs to be replaced by the more appropriate word 'corrupt'. The truth is that such problems in this country are traceable to excessive greed and corruption, and not to a lack of technical expertise.

The Bhakra Dam being a major government project, the services of the top engineers were obtained for its construction. But, no sooner was it ready than its walls began to crack, costing the government crores of rupees to rebuild.

Such events are frequent in this country. Despite all such ventures being supervised by technical experts, one hears of roads falling into disrepair the moment they are constructed, of buildings needing to be repaired almost immediately after being built, and of plans remaining incomplete even after projects are 'completed.' All this is the result of corruption and has nothing to do with a lack of technical expertise.

Corruption is a psychological evil, while lack of skill is a technical shortcoming. A psychological evil cannot be removed by technical improvement. If we are genuinely interested in making a better society in our country, we shall have to work for the psychological, or moral reform of the individuals who comprise the nation. Merely bringing about an increase in the number of technical courses available will not make them turn over a new leaf.

The More Hurry, the Less Speed

An Indian Airlines Airbus, flight IC 406, from Bombay to Delhi, left Bombay half an hour behind schedule. Soon after the take-off, one of the passengers sent a note to the pilot, Captain Bhatnagar, asking him the reason for the delay in departure. The latter asked him to come to the cockpit so that he could explain the position to him.

The passenger not only refused to be convinced, but hit captain Bhatnagar from behind saying:
"I have seen many pilots like you!"

Upset over the incident, Captain Bhatnagar decided to return to Bombay 25 minutes after the take-off. This naturally led to strong protests from the other passengers. Later, the Indian Airlines arranged for another crew to take the flight to Delhi. The net result? The flight reached Delhi over three hours late.

This is an example of how important it is to adopt a patient attitude in life. The above-mentioned passenger refused to put up with a delay of half an hour, and, as a result, he had to wait for three hours. Had he remained patient about the half-hour delay, he would have certainly saved himself the trouble of waiting for three hours.

Further, according to the report, a high-level inquiry has been ordered into the incident by the Airlines.

No matter what the result of the inquiry, it is certain that the passenger will have to sacrifice more of the thing he had wanted to savetime.

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

A young aspiring Muslim student from Azamgarh, A.M. Khan by name, stood nervously before the Principal of Hindu College. "Sir, I should very much like to be admitted to the B.Sc. course in your college." The reaction was sharp. "The admissions are closed. How do you expect to be admitted in the month of October when you are already several months late with your applications." Unforeseen circumstances had prevented young Khan from applying sooner, but he simply said, "It would be extremely kind of you if you would help me." Then he added hesitatingly, "One whole year will be wasted for me if I am not granted admission." The Principal's reply was stern. "There is just no question of further admissions."

The principal talked in such an offhand manner that it should have been obvious that there was no point in persisting. Even so the student was determined to try his luck, although all he really expected was to be asked to leave the room immediately. On seeing the insistence of the student, the principal finally asked him rather drily what his marks had been in the previous examinations, because he felt certain that he must have failed to get admission elsewhere due to his low marks. If this were the case, the principal would have had good grounds for rejecting his application. But the student's reply was just the opposite of what he expected. He said, "Eighty five percent, sir."

These words worked like a miracle. The principal's mood changed all of a sudden, and he asked the student to sit down and show him his certificates. When he had seen them and was satisfied that the student's claim was true, he told him to write out an ante-dated application.

Not only was the student then given admission in spite of such a long delay in applying, but he was also granted a scholarship by this very same principal who had been so reluctant even to give him a hearing.

Had the same student approached the principal with a third class degree, and had been refused admission as a result, he would surely have gone away full of hatred for the principal concerned, and would have remarked to his friends that it was prejudice which had come in his way. He would not have admitted that he had been refused admission because of his poor results. He would have publicly understood by aspirants to high positions that the response of the society we live in is usually an echo of our own condition. We tend to attribute the evils afflicting us to society so that we may shake ourselves free of the blame.

When a man enters life fully prepared to meet its challenges, the world cannot but give him due recognition. Never in any environment does he fail to receive the position of honour which is his due. This results in his being able to maintain high moral standards. His conduct is then marked by bravery, confidence, broad-mindedness, gentlemanliness, acknowledgement of others' worth and a realistic approach to life. He has the will and the capacity to enter into proper human relationships. Society having recognized his talents and he in turn having given due acknowledgement to society, he can rise above the negative attitudes of hatred and prejudice.

The reverse is true when, because he cannot come up to the required standards, he fails to prove his worth; when he enters life with inadequate training he surely fails to find a place of his choice in the world. As a depressed personality, he almost certainly develops a low moral character. He falls a prey to negative psychologyanger, complaint, even criminality. Failure in life gives birth to this negative psychology, because it is seldom that the person concerned blames himself for his failure. He almost always lays the blame on others for his own shortcomings. Inadequate preparation for life brings two evils simultaneouslyfailure on one's own part and uncalled-for complaint against others.

A stone is hard to all and sundry. But it presents no problems to anyone who has a tool which can break it. The same is true of the more complex obstacles that face us in life, for it is only if you enter the field of life equipped with the proper skills, that you feel entitled to claim what is your due. Even after the "last date" you can be given admission to a college without anyone else intervening to help you. But without the necessary skills and ability, you will fail to find the place you truly deserve.

Anyone who wants success to come his way in this world of God will first have to make himself deserving of it. He must know himself and his circumstances. He must organize and channelise his energies properly. He must enter the field fully armed in every respect, then others cannot fail to recognize his true value. He must be like the tree which forces its way up through the undergrowth to take its place in the sun.

Negligence: A Moral Deficiency

It is hard to believe that any animal could be more dangerous or terrifying than the man-eating tiger. But it is not the tiger or the bear which is the most dangerous enemy of man. In truth, the most dangerous of our enemies are the bacteria which are so tiny that they remain invisible to the naked eye. Small they may be, but these bacteria breed at such a furious rate that, given favourable conditions, one of their number can reproduce itself 10,000 times over within a mere matter of ten hours. While a bear or a lion only occasionally eats a man alive, man is the constant focus of deadly bacteria.

Their species run into thousands. We are fortunate, however, in that 99 percent are either beneficial or harmless. Though only one percent is harmful, its deadliness is such that it can claim the life of a man within a matter of seconds. All fatal diseases, according to medical science, are produced by such micro-organisms. Their very lack of bulk makes it possible for them to enter the human system in ways against which man has no natural system of defence.

People are usually aware of big and obvious dangers, and imagine they must be responsible for all their misfortunes. But, if the truth were told, the harm done to us by these tiny living organisms far surpasses any havoc our bigger enemies can wreak. Yet, when we come to think of it, the greatest damage of all is done by those seemingly insignificant and often short-lived moments of neglectmoments when timely action was our duty, when approval needed to be given or withheld, when advice or help or self-appraisal was needed, and we let the occasion slip by, heedless of the consequences. Easy-going negligence can creep into our souls, like bacteria into the body, and, if not pulled up short, can become an ingrained attitude, leading to moral corrosion.

A negligent attitude permits people to fritter away their time, day after day, with no thought for the future. Similarly, they squander substantial portions of their income. This wasted time and pointless expenditure may seem a trivial matter, if it is just a question of one day a few hours and a few rupees don't seem to add up to much. But if one were to calculate the time and money thus wasted in one year and then in a whole lifetime, it would become clear that fully fifty percent of one's life and earnings had been squandered in vain pursuits. Take the total wastage of a whole nation and the loss assumes such enormous proportions that it quite goes beyond the imagination.

A Lesson from a Tiger

Jim Corbett, after whom a famous national park in India has been named, was an expert on the nature of tigers. He once wrote: "No tiger attacks a human being unless provoked." People who live in jungle areas where tigers roam will confirm the truth of Jim Corbett's words. There is usually no cause for concern when one comes face to face with a tiger. Unless it is provokedor harbours deep-rooted suspicion of human beingsthe beast will ignore one and continue on its way.

And how does this suspicion form in some tigers? Tigers are by nature not ill-disposed towards human beings. Only very few of them can be called man-eaters, and even they were not born as such. They became man-eaters, not through any fault of their own, but through the folly of human beings. Usually it is inexperienced hunters who do the damage. They shoot at a beast, wounding but not killing it. A tiger injured in this manner becomes man's enemy. Wherever it sees a human being, it attacks and kills. The same is true of most beasts of prey. They only attack man when they have already been wounded by him.

This information from the world of nature holds deep significance for man. It shows that one should not think of anyone not even the most savage people as one's enemy in advance. One will only be treated as an enemy if that is how one sees others. If one does not view them with animosity, they are more likely to be amicable in return.

The second lesson is that one should not take measures against anyone without sufficient preparation. If the measures that one takes are indecisive, they are sure to be counter-productive. The other party will only become further provoked, and tension between the two will deepen further.

Everyone has certain needs and desires in this world, which they remain busy fulfilling. The secret of life is not to stand in a person's way. If one does not make oneself a target for another's vengeance, but lets everyone continue pursuing his own goal in life, then one is not going to find one's own path blocked by others. One will find everyone so absorbed in minding his own business that he has no time to interfere with that of others.

Realizing One's Own Shortcomings

He had reached old age and was still unmarried. When asked his reason for remaining a bachelor, he said that he had always been looking for a perfect spouse. "But in all this time, did you not find one?" he was asked. "Once I did," he replied, "but unfortunately she was looking for a perfect spouse too, and I did not come up to the required standard."

Generally people are expert at detecting the faults of others. That is why they are unable to get on with anybody. If they were to seek out their own faults, instead of those of others, they would realize that they are in the same position as they find others to be in. Awareness of one's own shortcomings makes for a spirit of humility in individuals and unity in society. If one sees only the faults of others, on the other hand, one will become arrogant, and perennially be at odds with one's fellows.

It is a fact of psychology that no single person can be an amalgam of all good qualities. Just as there are many shades of grey between black and white, so are there many gradations of good and evil in ordinary human beings. While few are saints, few also are the out-and-out villains of this life, and many are the combinations of different qualities and defects than one can find in any given individual. It is no simple matter to label a person wholly good or wholly bad. If there is to be harmony within a community, the bad sides of its members must be tolerated, while their good sides are appreciated. In this way, no talent is lost to society, and fellow-feeling will prevail. This is a principle that should be remembered in all life's relationships. Man and wife, employer and employee, businessman and partner all need to keep it in mind. If we want to pluck "flowers," we have also to bear the "thorns" that come with them. There is no way that one who cannot put up with thorns will be able to possess the flowers of this life.

There are few great tasks which can be accomplished by individuals single-handedly. Only the talents of several individuals combined can achieve any substantial work. Just as this is true in commercial and political spheres, so is it true of religious work also. But in whatever field work is going on, people will only be able to work together if they are patient and tender-hearted in their outlook. They will have to bear with one another, putting ill-feeling behind them, not becoming alienated towards one another over petty issues. It is all very well to be an idealist, but if one eternally seeks the ideal in people, one is bound to be disappointed. The only way to be able to work with others, then, is to overlook the fact that they do not come up to one's ideal standard, and even to extend moral support to those who seem the most deficient.



GOD ARISES

A book by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in serials.

Review

An account has been given in the preceding pages of those anti-religionist arguments which are generally put forward in order to prove that modernity leaves no room for religion.

Let us first examine the argument which is based on research carried out in the field of the physical sciences, i.e. that studies of the universe have shown that whatever events take place do so in accordance with specific laws of nature. This argument would have it that there is no necessity to assume the existence of an unknown God in order to explain these events, since known laws already exist to explain them. The best answer to this argument is the one given by a Christian theologian: 'Nature is a fact, not an explanation.'

Physicists, of course, are right in saying that they have discovered the laws of nature, but what they have discovered is not, in essence, the answer to the problems in order to solve which religion has come into existence. It is religion which points towards the real causes of the creation of the universe, whereas the finding of physicists are confined to determining the outward structure of this universe as it appears to exist before us. What modern Science tells us is only a elaboration upon, rather than an explanation of reality. The entire body of modern scientific enquiry is concerned only with the question: 'What is it that exists?' The question: 'Why does it exist?' is far beyond its purview. Yet it is upon this second issue that we should be seeking enlightenment.

To illustrate this point, let us consider how a chick comes into this world. In embryo, it develops inside the smooth, hard shell of an egg, then it emerges when the shell breaks up. How does it come about that the shell breaks up at the right moment and the fledgling, which is no more than a small lump of flesh, finds its way into the outer world? In the past, the obvious answer was: 'It is the hand of God.' But now, microscopic studies have shown that on the completion of twenty-one days, when the chick is ready to emerge, there appears on its beak a small hard horn with which this 'lump of flesh' is able to break through the walls of its cell. The horn, having done its job, falls off a few days later. This observation, from the point of view of the anti-religionists, contradicts the old concept that it is God who brings the chick out of the shell, because the microscope has clearly shown that a 21-day law exists which is responsible for creating conditions which make it possible for the chick to emerge from the shell. This is a mere fallacy. What modern observation has done is to add a few more links to the chain of factors which lead up to an event. It does not tell us the real cause of the occurrence. It has just shifted the problem of the breaking up of the shell to the development of the horn. The breaking of the shell by the chick is simply an intermediate stage in the occurrence rather than its cause. Will the cause of the event be understood only when we learn what made the horn appear on the chick's beak? In other words, when we have traced the event back to its primary cause, the cause which 'knew' that the chick required some hard instrument to break through the shell and, therefore, in exactly twenty-one days, compelled a hard substance to appear on the beak in the form of a horn and to fall off after having discharged its function?

'How does the shell break?' was the question that faced man previously. Now, in the light of recent observations, instead of an answer, we have another question: 'How does the horn develop?' In the context of perceived phenomena, there is no difference in the nature of these two questions. At the most, questions of the type that lead us from one link to another in the chain of cause and effect demand an extention of the observation of facts, if they are to be answered at all. On this basis, they do not elicit any valid explanation. The American biologist, Cecil Boyce Hamann, has this to say:

Where the mysteries of digestion and assimilation were seen as evidence of Divine intervention, they now are explained in terms of chemical reactions, each reaction under the control of an enzyme. But does it rule God out of His universe? Who determined that these reactions should take place, and that they should be so exactly controlled by the enzymes? One glance at a present-day chart of the

various cyclic reactions and their interaction with each other rules out the possibility that this was just a chance relationship that happened to work. Perhaps here, more than any place else, man is learning that God works by principles that He established with the creation of life.¹

From this one can understand the actual value of modern discoveries. Science and technology having vastly increased the practicability and precision of human observation, it has been possible to deduce the natural laws that bind the universe and according to which it functions to perfection. For instance, in ancient times, man simply knew that drops of water fell out of the clouds on to the earth. But now the whole process of rainfall is widely understood, from the evaporation of sea-water to the precipitation of rain and the final journeying of the fresh water back to the sea. But the kind of understanding brought by these discoveries is nothing but the possession of more highly detailed information, which does not tell us ultimately why these physical processes take place. Science does not tell us how or why the laws of nature came into being, how or why they continue to exist or why they cause the earth and the heavens to function with such unfailing precision that, simply by observation of them, it was possible to establish immutable scientific laws. The claim that by learning the laws of nature one could arrive at an explanation of the universe was mere delusion. It provided an answer to the question, but it was an irrelevant one in that it accepted the intermediary physical links in the chain as primary causes. As Cecil Boyce Hamann so aptly says, 'Nature does not explain, she is herself in need of an explanation.'

'Why is blood red in colour?' If you were to ask a doctor the reason, he would answer, 'Because your blood contains millions of little red discs (5 millions to each cubic centimeter), each some seven thousandths of an inch in diameter, called the red corpuscles.'

'Yes, but why are these discs red?'

'Because they contain a substance called haemoglobin, which, when it absorbs oxygen from the lungs, becomes bright red. That is why the blood in the arteries is scarlet. As it flows through the body, the blood gives up its oxygen to the organs of the body and the haemoglobin becomes brownish -this is the dark blood of the veins.'

'Yes. But where do the red corpuscles with their haemoglobin come from?'

'They are made in the spleen.'

'That's marvelous, Doctor. But, tell me, how is it that the blood, the red corpuscles, the spleen, and the thousand other things are so organised into one coherent whole, work together so perfectly that I can breathe, run, speak, live?'

'Ah! That is nature.'

'Nature!'

'When I say "nature", I mean the interplay of blind physical and chemical forces.'

'But, Doctor, why do these blind forces always act as if they were pursuing a definite end? How do they manage to coordinate their activities so as to produce a bird which flies, a fish which swims, and me . . . who ask questions.'

'My dear friend, I, a scientist, can tell you how these things happen. Do not ask me why they are like that.'

While there is no gainsaying the fact that science has set up for us a vast storehouse of knowledge, this dialogue clearly shows that it has its limits. There is a point beyond which it can offer no further explanations. Its discoveries then fall very far short of giving us the kind of answers provided by religion. Even if the quantum of scientific discoveries were increased by billions, the necessity for religion would in no way be obviated, for such discoveries throw light only on what is concrete and observable. They tell us what is happening. They do not provide answers to the questions, 'Why is it happening?' and 'What is the primary cause?' All such discoveries are of an intermediate, subsidiary and non-absolute nature.

If science is to replace religion, it shall have to discover the ultimate and absolute explanation. Let us

take the example of a machine which is functioning without our being able to see how it works, because it is enclosed in a metallic casing. When we remove this casing, we can see how the various cogwheels move in conjunction with a number of other parts of the mechanism. Does this mean that, in discovering the mechanics of the thing, we have truly understood the cause of its motion? Have we really grasped its secrets? And does the possession of knowledge about the functioning of a machine give us proof that it is self-manufacturing, self-replicating and works automatically? If the answer to this is 'No', then how do a few glances at the mechanism of the universe prove that this entire system came into existence unaided and of its own accord, and is continuing to function independently? Criticizing Darwinism, A. Harris made a similar remark: 'Natural Selection may explain the survival of the fittest but cannot explain the arrival of the fittest.'

Now take the psychological argument, which holds that far from being a reality, the concept of God and the life hereafter is a myth, a mere fiction, a stretching of the human personality and human wishes to the cosmic scale. I fail to understand what possible basis there can be for this claim. Moreover, if I were indeed to claim that human personality and human wishes did, in fact, exist on a cosmic plane, I doubt if my antagonists would have sufficient factual data to refute my claim.

If we are to talk of scales, let us see what is happening at the atomic level, where we are dealing with infinitesimally small distances. According to the Bohr theory, an invisible atom possesses an internal structure similar to our solar system, with electrons revolving around a nucleus in the same way that planets revolve around the sun. How vastly different the scales, for in the solar system, distances are measured in millions of miles. Yet, in spite of the scales being so different as to boggle the imagination, the systems are exactly the same. Would it be any wonder then if the consciousness, which we as human beings experience existed on a cosmic scale but in a totally perfect form? As an intellectual exercise, it is no more difficult to accept this, than to accept the motion that genes, although only microscopic elements in the human embryo, control the growth and development of a six-foot-tall man. Might not the human and natural desire for a world immeasurably vaster than our own be an echo-spiritual and other-worldly-of a world already existing in this universe in a form invisible to human eyes?

Psychologists are right in holding that sometimes ideas are repressed in our minds during childhood, which erupt at a later stage in an extra-ordinary form. But to infer that it is this very characteristic in humans which has given birth to religion is to jump to wrong conclusions. It is a misinterpretation, if not an actual distortion of a perfectly ordinary fact. It is as if observing a potter designing an image of clay, I deduce that it must be he who has created human beings. Image-making and the creation of the human body differ from each other in so qualitative a fashion that to draw any parallels with God's creativity would be utterly preposterous. It is only minds which see fit to make such analogies which look upon religion as a result of the inchoate ramblings of mentally deranged individuals.

It is a general weakness of modern thought that it jumps to extraordinary conclusions on the basis of facts which carry no weight from the logical point of view. An emotionally disturbed individual may babble abnormally under the influence of thoughts repressed in the unconscious, but how does this prove that the knowledge of the universe revealed to the prophets is also a 'babbling' of the same nature-a 'miracle' of the unconscious? It is possible to accept incoherence in sleeping and in waking as the result of mental disturbance, but to assert that this is the true source of divine revelation is to descend to illogical and unscientific argument. It merely shows that those who reason in this way are hard put to it to find any other criterion by which to judge the extraordinary words of the prophets. It does not follow that because agnostics possess only one yardstick by which to measure reality, there exists, de facto, one and only one such yardstick.

Let us suppose that a group of creatures who possessed the faculty of hearing, but not that of speech, landed on earth from a distant planet. On hearing the conversation and discourses of human beings they started to investigate sound. What was it, and where did it come from? In the course of their research, they came across a tree whose branches, being interlocked, produced grating, squeaking noises because of the friction accidentally created by sudden, squally winds. As soon as the wind stopped blowing, the noise stopped too. This phenomenon was repeated with each gust of wind. Now an 'expert' from amongst them, on careful observation of this phenomenon, conveyed telepathically that the secret of human speech had been

discovered, namely, that the teeth in the upper and lower jaws in the human mouth were responsible for producing sound. When the upper and lower teeth came close together causing friction- a sound was produced called human speech. This friction between two objects does, in fact, produce sound, but just as it is incorrect to explain the origin of human speech by referring to this friction, it is likewise ludicrous to explain prophetic words as garbled utterances welling up from a deeply troubled unconscious.

The thoughts suppressed in the unconscious mind are mostly those reprehensible wishes which could not be realized for fear of social and familial castigation. For instance, if someone felt a desire to have incestuous relations with his sister or his daughter, he would repress such feelings, lest their expression should bring down upon him the full weight of social censure. Similarly, if any one felt inclined to commit murder, the fear he would have of being put behind bars and the ensuing feelings of frustration would very likely cause him to repress his initial impulses.

In other words, the wishes suppressed in the unconscious are mostly such evil designs as could not be realized for fear of punishment and/or social ostracism. Now, if the subconscious part of the mind of a mentally disturbed person begins to find an outlet, what is likely to come gushing out of it? Obviously the afflicted person will talk incoherently while attempting to give expression to those same hostile feelings and evil desires which had remained suppressed in his sub-conscious. And, if we are to think of him as a prophet, it will be as a prophet of evil, certainly not of good. Religious thoughts expressed in prophetic diction are, by comparison, virtue and purity par excellence. The true prophet is himself the epitome of virtue and his purity in thought, word and deed has no parallel. His ideas, moreover, exercise such a powerful influence upon people that the very society from which at one time the prophet had initially to conceal his ideas – out of fear – is now so greatly attracted towards them, that even after a lapse of centuries together, it still steadfastly adheres to them.

From the psychological point of view, the unconscious mind is actually a vacuum. In it, nothing initially exists. It receives all impressions through the conscious part of the mind. This implies that the unconscious stores only those experiences to which people have been exposed at one time or the other. The unconscious can never become a repository for facts which have not been experienced. But, surprisingly, religion as proclaimed by the prophets, contains truths which were previously unknown to them and for that matter, to the entire human race. It was only with the advent of the prophets that certain facts could be propagated. Had the unconscious been the repository on which they drew, they could not have become the purveyors of great, but unknown truths which they were.

The religion proclaimed by the prophets contain a great body of knowledge, touching in one way or the other on all branches of learning, such as astronomy, physics, biology, psychology, history, civilization, politics and sociology. No individual, however gifted, whether drawing on the conscious or subconscious minds, has ever been able to produce such an all-embracing discourse, free from erroneous decisions, vain conjectures, unreal statements, miscalculations and unsound logic. But religious scriptures are admirably and miraculously free of such deficiencies. In their approach, reasoning and decisions, they encompass all of the human sciences. Over the centuries, for thousands of years, succeeding generations have sifted through the findings of their predecessors, examined them, considered them from all angles, and often disproved and rejected what their forebears had considered truths as firm as rocks. But the truths which are enshrined in religion remain unchallenged to this day. So far, it has not been possible to point out a single error, or even discrepancy in them worth the name. Those who have ventured to attack the bastions of religion have eventually been forced to fall back without scaling its battlements, for they themselves have finally been proved to be in the wrong.

At this point, I think it would be pertinent to give the gist of an article in which James Henry Breasted, an astronomer, has claimed, beyond all question of doubt, to have discovered a technical error in the Quran. He points out that, among the West Asian nations, age-old custom and the dominance of Islam in particular, gave currency to the lunar calendar, and that Muhammad (peace be on him) carried the difference between the solar and lunar years to the furthest extreme of absurdity. Breasted claims that he was so ignorant of the nature of the problems of a calendar that, in the Quran, he categorically prohibited the addition of inter-calary months.

The so-called lunar year of three hundred and fifty four days, lags behind the solar year by eleven days. This being so, during the course of each of its cycles, it exceeds the solar year by one year in every 33 years, and by three years in every century. If a religious practice such as fasting, (in the month of Ramadhan) falls at this time in June, then after six years it will fall in April. Now (in 1935 A.D.) 1313 years have elapsed since the migration which initiated the Hijri era. Each century of ours consists of 103 years according to the Lunar year of the Muslims. After 1313 years of the Solar Calendar, the Muslim Calendar records approximately 41 years more. In this way, the Hijri era of Muslims, at the time of this writing has reached upto 1354, i.e., according to the solar scale, there is an addition of 41 years in 1313 years. The Jewish church of the oriental countries have done away with this type of absurdity, and have adopted the practice of Intercalation, thus bringing its lunar calendar in line with the solar year. Because of this dis-parity, the entire West Asia has to suffer from this most antiquated practice of using the lunar calendar.¹

I shall not at this point go into the intricacies of the solar and lunar calendars. I would merely point out that the charge of 'extremely absurd ignorance' levelled against the Prophet of Islam is based upon a misunderstanding of the Quran, and is, therefore, without foundation. It is not 'intercalation' which is prohibited by the Quran, but the practice of *nasa'* (9:37). *Nasa'* in Arabic, means delay, i.e. to postpone, or place in a different order. For example, if an animal is drinking at a fountain and you take it away and put your own animal in its place so that it may drink first, this would amount to an unwarrantable seizure of a privilege. In Arabic, this act of placing animals in different order or replacing animals would be termed

This interpretation of the expression has a direct bearing on the ordering of the Islamic calendar, with special reference to the four months out of the twelve designated as sacred by the Prophet Abraham (blessings on him). These months were

known as Zu'l-Qa'dah, Zu'l-Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab, during which fighting and bloodshed were totally prohibited. People could then travel about freely, knowing that they could carry on their trading in complete safety. They could also go on the Haj pilgrimage without fear of brigandage.

However, at a later period, when rebellious tendencies were beginning to make themselves felt among the Arab tribes, the latter devised the custom of postponement in order to evade this law. Whenever any powerful Arab tribe was determined to do battle during the month of Muharram – which was a sacred month – the tribal chief would declare that they had deleted Muharram from the list of sacred months and had replaced it with the month of Safar, which was now to be regarded as sacred. This practice of tampering with the sacred months was called *nasa'* and it is this practice which the Quran has called 'an act more ignoble than infidelity,' for it gave tamperers an undue advantage over others, who would obviously hesitate to fight during the sacred months.

Certain scholars have written that it was the general practice among Arabs to regard particular years as consisting of fourteen months instead of twelve. A commentator of the Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, points out that: 'That intercalation of a month after every three years as practised by some nations in order to make an adjustment in the calculation of months does not come under the heading of *nasa'*, which is prohibited.'

'It also upset the security of the Month of Pilgrimage. In the verse (9:36) this arbitrary and selfish conduct of the pagan Arabs which abolished a wholesome check on unregulated warfare which is condemned.' Another commentator, George Sale, remarks: This was an invention or innovation of the idolatrous Arabs, whereby they avoided keeping a sacred month, when it suited not their convenience, by keeping a profane month in its stead; transferring, for example, the observance of Muharram to the succeeding month, Safar.

This clearly shows that, even in an age of ignorance, the Prophet of God said nothing that 'smacked of ignorance'. Had his words emanated from his unconscious mind, he would inevitably have uttered such words as would have revealed such ignorance.

Scholars who study religion in the context of history or the social sciences suffer from the fundamental drawback of not looking at religion in the correct perspective. In so doing, their views become thoroughly distorted. They are like people who stand in a crooked position in order to look at a square, and, viewing it from an acute angle, decide it is rectangular. The square is still a square, it is just that the viewers' stand-point

is wrong, or merely irrelevant.

It was from just such a skewed angle that T.R. Miles asserted that 'the religion is the product of a certain type of interaction between man and his environment.' The basic mistake these scholars make is to study religion as an objective issue (Julian Huxley, *Man in the Modern World*, p.129). That is, they collect indiscriminately all the historical material that goes under the name of religion, and then form an opinion about religion in the light of whatever material has come their way. Thus they take up a wrong position at the very outset.

Miles' summing up is that 'religion' like any other subject, can be treated as an objective problem, and studied by the method of science. The first step is to make a list of the ideas and practices associated, with different religions – gods and demons, sacrifice, prayer, belief in a future life, tabus and moral rules in life. It is like making a collection of animals and plants. Science always begins in this way, but it cannot stop at this level: it inevitably seeks to penetrate deeper to make an analysis.

This analysis may take two directions. It may seek for a further understanding of religion as it now exists, or it may adopt the historical method and search for an explanation of the present in the past.

With regard to the historical approach, it is clear that religion like other social activities evolves. Further, its evolution is determined by momentum, its inner logic: the other is the influence of the material and social conditions of the period. As an example of the first, take the tendency from polytheism towards monotheism: granted the theistic premise, this tendency seems almost inevitably to declare itself in the course of time.¹

Religion consequently comes to be regarded as a mere social process, rather than as a revelation of reality. That which is a revelation of reality is an ideal in itself, and its history with all its manifestations has to be studied in this light. On the other hand, that which is only a social process has no inherent ideal. The response of society alone determines its position. Anything which enjoys the status of a social norm or social tradition can retain its position so long as society gives it a de facto status. If society discards it and adopts any other practice in its place, then only its historical interest can survive and its importance as a social tradition falls into oblivion.

But the case of religion is vastly different from this. As the eminent physician, Fred Hoyle puts it, 'This moral or religious impulse, whatever we choose to call it, is extraordinarily strong. When faced by opposition, and even by powerful political attempts at suppression, it obstinately refuses to lie down and die. One often comes on statements that religion is a primitive superstition that modern man can well do without. Yet if the impulse were truly primitive in a biological sense (as for instance patriotic loyalty to the group in which one happens to live is primitive) we would surely expect to see it in other animals. As far as I know, no one has advanced any evidence for this idea. The religious impulse appears to be unique to man, and indeed to have become stronger in pre-history the more advanced man became in his intellectual attainments. Admittedly the trend has reversed over the recent past, but the change over the past two centuries may well prove to be impermanent.... Stripped of the many fanciful adornments with which religion has become surrounded, does it not amount to an instruction within us that expressed rather simply might read as follows: You are derived from something "out there" in the sky. Seek it and you will find much more than you expect.'²

We cannot, therefore, study religion in the same fashion as we take stock of our household goods, modes of conveyance, clothing, housing, etc. This is because religion is an entity in itself, which is either accepted, rejected or accepted in a partial or distorted form by society of its own free will. As a result, religion remains the same in its essence while assuming a diversity of forms which evolve according to the practices of particular societies. It is wrong, therefore, to classify all the different forms of religion prevalent in different societies . under the common heading of "religion". We shall illustrate this with reference to democracy.

Democracy is a system of government by the people, directly or by representation, and a country may be said to be truly democratic only when its political organization abides by this criterion. Now if an approach to the understanding of democracy is made by examining all those countries who call their governments democratic, and then trying by a process of induction to form a clear picture of it on the basis of whatever common denominators present themselves, the image which will emerge, rather than being crystal clear, will

¹T.R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook..*

²Fred Hoyle, *The Intelligent Universe*, p. 233.

be like muddied water stirred up by some floundering animal. Democracy, as a term, will then be meaningless. Consider the democracies of Britain, America, China and Egypt. Do they really have anything in common? In what way is the democracy of India similar to the democracy of Pakistan? The term democracy becomes even more confusing if all the varieties of democracy in the world today are placed within an evolutionary framework. A study of the development of democracy in France – its very birthplace – will show that at a later stage of its evolution, it was synonymous with the military dictatorship of General de Gaulle (1890-1970).

Such a study of religion, in which the process of induction is unlikely to yield correct results, might well bring one to the conclusion that the idea of God can be dispensed with, because the history of religion presents the example of Buddhism – a religion without a God. Today, the idea is widely advocated that religion should be studied, but that God, as a possibility, should be excluded. Advocates of this course tend to argue that even if religion is necessary for the inculcation of discipline, belief in God should not be regarded as compulsory. They feel that a Godless religion serves the same purpose. Citing Buddhism, they maintain that, in the present advanced age, such a form of religious structure is more suitable to the needs of society. To such thinkers, society, along with its political and economic objectives is itself the God of the modern age. 'Parliament is the Prophet of this God, through which He informs mankind of His will, and dams and factories rather than mosques and churches are His places of worship'.¹

The study of religion by the evolutionary method holds it to be progressing from belief in God to denial of God (e.g. Buddhism). Scholars who adhere to this view first collect all the material which has been attributed over the ages to religion, then, independently of those whose approach is essentially an internal one, they arrange this material in an evolutionary sequence, intentionally omitting any details which might cast doubt on its validity.

For instance, after extensive research, anthropologists and sociologists 'discovered' that the concept of God began with polytheism and, progressing gradually, was developed into monotheism. But, according to them, this cycle of evolution has turned in the reverse direction, turning the concept of monotheism into contradiction. The concept of a 'multiplicity of gods', according to them, at least had a certain intrinsic value in that, while putting their faith in 'different gods', people could live in harmony, acknowledge the existence of the gods of other communities. But the doctrine of 'one God' has naturally negated all other gods and their believers, thus giving birth to the concept of a 'Higher Religion' which, in turn, gave rise to unending wars among the various groups and nations. Thus the concept of God, having evolved in the wrong direction, has dug its own grave in accordance with the law of evolution.²

The fact that the concept of God started with monotheism has been totally omitted in this evolutionary sequence. According to known history, Noah (blessings on him) was the first prophet who, it has been established, exhorted people to believe in one God. Moreover, 'Polytheism' does not mean a multiplicity in the absolute sense, as is commonly understood. No nation has ever been 'polytheist' in the sense that it believed in many gods of the same order. In fact, polytheism implies a hierarchy with one 'Supreme God' at the top and his entourage of demigods spreading downwards from Him on the rungs of the divine ladder. Polytheism has always carried with it the concept of a 'God of gods'. This shows how base-less are the claims of this so-called evolutionary religion.

The Marxist approach to history is even more bereft of meaning, being based on the hypothesis that it is economic conditions alone which are the real factors which shape man. According to Marx, religion came into existence in an age of feudalism and capitalism. Since these systems were tyrannical and fostered exploitation, the moral and religious concepts which evolved under them had, of necessity, reflected their environment. They were no more than doctrines which condoned and upheld exploitation. But this theory does not, academically, carry any weight. Nor does experience testify to it. This theory, based on a total denial of the human will, regards man simply as a product of economic conditions. Like the soap-cakes manufactured in a factory, man is moulded in the factory of environment. He does not act with an independent mind, but simply conforms to whatever conditioning he has been subjected to. If this were an incontrovertible fact, how could it have been possible for Marx, himself the product of a capitalistic society', to revolt against the economic conditions prevailing in his times? If the contemporary economic system gave birth to religion,

¹ Julian Huxley, *Religion without Revelation*.

² Julian Huxley, *Man in the Modern World*, p. 112.

why not believe then, according to the same logic, that Marxism too is the product of the same conditions? If the stand taken by Marxism on religion is correct, why should this not be applicable to Marxism itself? It follows that this theory is absurd. There is no scientific and rational proof to support it.

Experience too has exposed the false premises of this theory. The example of the U.S.S.R., where this ideology has been predominant for the last sixty-five years, will serve to illustrate our point.

It has been claimed for a long time now that material conditions in the Soviet Union have changed. The system of production, exchange and distribution have all become non capitalistic. But after the death of Stalin, it was admitted by the Russian leaders themselves that Stalin's regime was one of tyranny and coercion, and that the masses had been exploited in the same manner as in capitalist countries. It should be borne in mind that it was absolute control of the press by the government which made it possible for Stalin to project his tyranny and exploitation as justice and fair play to the rest of the world. As the press is still under complete government control, we must infer that the same drama, which was staged with such success in Stalin's times, is still going on today under the cloak of blatantly misleading propaganda. The 20th Congress (February 1956) of the Russian Communist Party exposed the tyrannical acts of Stalin. It will not be surprising if the 40th Congress of the party brings to light the barbarity of his predecessors. This half-a-century old experience clearly shows that the systems of production and exchange have nothing to do with the shaping of ideas. Had the human mind been subservient to the system of production, and had ideas taken shape in accordance with it, a communist state like Russia ought, strictly speaking, to have curbed the tendencies to oppress and exploit. Thus the whole argument of the modern age is nothing short of sophistry in the garb of scientific reasoning – a patchwork, a hotchpotch of discordant elements. Of course, the 'Scientific Method' has been adopted to study these 'facts', but this, by itself, cannot arrive at the correct results. Other essential factors must needs be taken into account. That is to say, that, if the scientific method is applied, but applied only to half-truths and one-sided data, in spite of its ostensible bona fides from the intellectual standpoint, it is bound to yield results which are far from being accurate.

Here is an apt illustration of this point. In the first week of January, 1964, an International Congress of Orientalists held in New Delhi, was attended by 1200 participants. On this occasion, one of the orientalists read a paper in which it was claimed that several of the Muslim monuments of India had actually been built by the Hindu Rajas and not by the Muslim rulers. The paper claimed that the Qutb Minar a tower, known to have been built by Sultan Qutbuddin Abek, was originally a 'Vishnu Dhwaj', a symbol of Lord Vishnu built by Samudra Gupta 2300 years ago. 'Qutb Minar' was a misnomer, the brainchild of Muslim historians of a later period. The main argument in support of the claim was that the stones used in the construction of the Qutb Minar were very ancient and that their carvings had been done centuries before the period of Qutbuddin Abek. Prima facie, the argument is scientific in that such ancient stones are to be found in the structure of the Qutb Minar. But the study of the Qutb Minar with reference only to its stones cannot give support to any truly scientific argument. Over and above this, several other aspects of the question have to be borne in mind, the most important one being that old stones from the ruins of ancient buildings were often used in new structures by subsequent builders, including the Muslims. This, together with the Qutb Minar's architectural design, the technique of placing the stones in position, the incomplete mosque in the vicinity of the tower, the remaining traces of the parallel tower, plus other pieces of similar historical evidence, points to Sultan Qutbuddin as being the actual builder, and shows the orientalist's contentions to be totally fallacious. The theories of the anti-religionists are no better. Just as in the above example, an attempt has been made to make a show of 'Scientific' reasoning by a willful misinterpretation of the presence of certain ancient stones, similarly, by presenting certain half-truths and a large number of irrelevant facts viewed from a distorted angle, the enemies of religion claim that their so-called scientific method of study has actually done away with religion. On the contrary, if the factual data on the subject is studied in its entirety and from the correct angle, an entirely opposite conclusion will most certainly be arrived at.

Indeed, the veracity of religion is proved by the fact that even the most intelligent of thinkers begin to talk nonsense when they refuse to make any reference to religion. Do away with religion and you do away with the essential framework within which your problems may be discussed and solved. Most of the scholars whose names figure on the list of anti-religionists are very intelligent and learned persons. These geniuses have

entered the arena of religious debate, equipped with the most valuable of contemporary sciences. But judging from the poor performance of these 'intelligent' people, one wonders what had so blighted their minds that they should have committed such absurdities to paper. Their outpourings are notorious for their wavering, contradictions, tacit admissions of ignorance and 'reasoning' which is, to say the least of it, haphazard. They make tall claims on flimsy grounds with an almost total disregard for facts. Their case must unquestionably fall to the ground, because it could only be a false case which is 'supported' by such erroneous statements and patently flawed arguments. A case which had the slightest merit would never be beset by such serious shortcomings.

The picture of life and the universe which takes shape in our minds on accepting religion is a very beautiful and gladdening one. This in itself establishes the truth of religion and the falsity of anti-religious theories. It conforms to the noble ideas of man in the very same way as the material universe is echoed in mathematical formulae. On the contrary the picture of reality which forms in consonance with an anti-religious philosophy is completely out of step with the human mind. On this point, J.W.N. Sullivan has made a very pertinent quotation from Bertrand Russell:

That man is the product of such causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system. And that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.¹

This extract sums up the irreligious, materialistic school of thought. According to such thinking, our prospects in life are darkened by gloom and despair. The materialistic interpretation of life also dispenses with any definite criterion for the judgement of good and evil. It justifies the dropping of bombs on human beings, the use of flame-throwers and chemical warfare, to name but a few of the scourges of modern times. This is not considered outrageous, tyrannical or bestially aggressive. After all, human beings have to die one way or another. Religious thought, by contrast, affords a glowing ray of hope, giving to both life and death a joyous and meaningful radiance. In this way it fulfills our psychological needs. When a scientist propounds a theory, which is found to conform to mathematical formula, he is convinced that what he has discovered is a reality. Similarly, when religious concepts find a harmonious echo in the human psyche, this is a proof that this was the reality which human nature was in search of. It gives us such a sense of fulfillment that we are left with no real grounds for denying its truth. To quote the words of Earl Chester Rex, an American mathematician:

I use the accepted principle in science which governs the choice between two or more conflicting theories. According to this principle, the theory which explains all the pertinent facts in the simplest way is adopted. This same principle was used, long ago, to decide between the Ptolemaic, or earth-centered, theory and the Copernican theory which claims that the sun is the centre of the solar system. The Ptolemaic theory was so involved and so much more complicated than the Copernican that the earth-centered idea was discarded.²

I admit that this argument would not be regarded as fool-proof by many. The concept of God and religion will never fit into the narrow frame of their materialistic minds. Yet their dissatisfaction is not really due to any lack of sound reasoning behind religion – of that I am satisfied. No, the actual reason for their disaffection is that their prejudiced minds are not prepared to accept religious reasoning. Sir James Jeans, at the end of his book, *Mysterious Universe* correctly remarked: Our modern minds have a sort of bias in favour of the materialistic explanation of the facts

In his book, *Witness* Whittaker Chambers tells of how he was watching his little daughter one day, when he found that he had unconsciously become aware of the shape of her ear. He thought to himself how impossible it was that such delicate convolutions could have come about by chance. They could have been created only by premeditated design. But he pushed this thought out of his agnostic mind, because he

¹J.W.N. Sullivan, *Limitations of Science*, p. 175.

²The Evidence of God, p. 179.

realized that the next step in logical sequence would have to be: design presupposes God – a thesis he was not yet ready to accept. With reference to this incident, Thomas David Park, a research chemist, formerly Chairman of the Department of Chemistry, Stanford Research Institute, writes: 'I have known many scientists among my professors and research colleagues who have similar thoughts about observed facts in chemistry and physics.'¹

'Scientists' of the 'Modern' age are agreed upon the theory of evolution. This concept is becoming dominant in all scientific fields. An enchanting idol of spontaneous evolution has been set up in place of God. If the truth were told, the very dogma of organic evolution, from which all of the evolutionary concepts have been borrowed, is nothing but a hypothesis without any evidence. But this is not all. Some scientists have openly confessed that if they believe in the concept of evolution, it is simply because they can find no other alternative.

Sir Arthur Keith² (1866-1955) said in 1953 that evolution was unproved and unprovable and that we believed in it only because the only alternative was special creation and that was unthinkable.³

Scientists are thus agreed upon the validity of the evolution theory simply because, if they discard it, they will be left with no option but to believe in the concept of God.

I confess that it is beyond my power to satisfy those scholars whose bias in favour of materialistic reasoning is so strong that they are unable to keep their minds open to self-evident facts. There is a particular reason for the bias, about which George Herbert Blount, an American physicist has this to say:

Conviction of the reasonableness of theism and the tenuousness of atheism usually in itself does not cause a man to accept practical theism. There seems to be an almost innate suspicion that the recognition of Deity will somehow rob one of freedom. To the Scholar, who cherishes intellectual liberty, any thought of abridged freedom is especially dreadful.⁴

In much the same vein, the concept of prophethood has been described by Julian Huxley as an 'intolerable demonstration of superiority'. That is, the acceptance of someone as a prophet implies his elevation to such a high status that his word becomes the word of God, giving him, in consequence, the right to impose his will on the people, the right to make people accept his word as law. But then that is what it means to be a prophet, and when man is the creature and not the Creator, he is in the position of being the humble slave of God, and not God, how can this situation be changed or avoided simply on the basis of concepts which are the result of ignorance or wishful thinking?

Cressy Morrison, asks, with reason, in his book, *Man Does not Stand Alone*, 'How much must man advance before he fully realizes the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, grasps His goodness that we exist, assumes his full part in destiny and strives to live up to the highest code he is capable of understanding without attempting to analyze God's motive, or describe His attributes?'

Things are as they are. We cannot change the hard reality: we simply have to acknowledge it, accept it, bow to it. Now, if we are not to adopt an ostrich-like attitude, our best course is to believe in actuality, rather than deny it. By denying the truth, it is man who loses. His denial of the truth in no way alters, harms, or diminishes it. The truth is the truth.

¹The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe, edited by John Clover Monsma, (New York, 1958), pp. 73-74.

²Anatomist and physical anthropologist who specialized in the study of fossil man. A doctor of medicine, science, and law, Keith became a professor at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, London (1908), was professor of physiology at the Royal Institution, London (1918-23), and was rector of the University of Aberdeen (1930-33).

³Islamic Thoughts, December 1961.

⁴The Evidence of God, p. 130.

THE SECOND SURAH

AL BAQARAH (THE COW)

MEDINA PERIOD

THE TITLE of this *surah* is derived from the story narrated in verses 67-73. It is the first *surah* revealed in its entirety after the Prophet's exodus to Medina, and most of it during the first two years of that period; verses 275-281, however, belong to the last months before the Prophet's death (verse 281 is considered to be the very last revelation which he received).

Starting with a declaration of the purpose underlying the revelation of the Qur'an as a whole - namely, man's guidance in all his spiritual and worldly affairs *Al-Baqarah* contains, side by side with its constant stress on the necessity of God-consciousness, frequent allusions to the errors committed by people who followed the earlier revelations, in particular the children of Israel. The reference, in verse 106, to the abrogation of all earlier messages by that granted to the Prophet Muhammad is of the greatest importance for a correct understanding of this *surah* and indeed of the entire Qur'an. Much of the legal ordinances provided here (especially in the later part of the *surah*) touching upon questions of ethics, social relations, warfare, etc. are a direct consequence of that pivotal statement. Again and again it is pointed out that the legislation of the Qur'an corresponds to the true requirements of man's nature, and as such is but a continuation of the ethical guidance offered by God to man ever since the beginning of human history. Particular attention is drawn to Abraham, the prophet-patriarch whose intense preoccupation with the idea of God's oneness lies at the root of the three great monotheistic religions; and the establishment of Abraham's Temple, the Ka'bah, as the direction of the prayer for "those who surrender themselves to God" (which is the meaning of the word *muslimun*, sing. *muslim*), sets a seal, as it were, on the conscious self-identification of all true believers with the faith of Abraham.

Throughout this surah runs the five-fold Qur'anic doctrine that God is the self-sufficient fount of all being (*al-qayyum*); that the fact of His existence, reiterated by prophet after prophet, is accessible to man's intellect; that righteous living-and not merely believing-is a necessary corollary of this intellectual perception; that bodily death will be followed by resurrection and judgement; and that all who are truly conscious of their responsibility to God "need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve."

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE DISPENSER OF GRACE:

(1) *Alif. Lam. mim.*¹

- (2) THIS DIVINE WRIT let there be no doubt about
it - is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious²
(3) who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception.³ and are
constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance;⁴
(4) and who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon thee, [O Prophet,] as well as
in that which was bestowed before thy time:⁵ for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the
life to come!

1. Regarding the possible significance of the single letters called *al muqatta'at*, which occur at the beginning of some *surahs* of the Qur'an, see Appendix II, where the various theories bearing on this subject are discussed.

2. The conventional translation of *muttaqi* as "God-fearing" does not adequately render the *positive* content of this expression - namely, the awareness of His all-presence and the desire to mould one's existence in the light of this awareness; while the interpretation adopted by some translators, "one who guards himself against evil" or "one who is careful of his duty", does not give more than one particular aspect of the concept of God-consciousness.

(5) It is they who follow the guidance [which comes] from their Sustainer; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!

(6) BEHOLD, as for those who are bent on denying the truth⁶ it is all one to them whether thou warnest them or dost not warn them: they will not believe.

(7) God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil;⁷ and awesome suffering awaits them.

3 Al-ghayb (commonly, and erroneously, translated as "the Unseen") is used in the Qur'an to denote all those sectors or phases of reality which lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proved or disproved by scientific observation or even adequately comprised within the accepted categories of speculative thought: as, for instance, the existence of God and of a definite purpose underlying the universe, life after death, the real nature of time, the existence of spiritual forces and their inter-action, and so forth. Only a person who is convinced that the ultimate reality comprises far more than our *observable* environment can attain to belief in God and, thus, to a belief that life has meaning and purpose. By pointing out that it is "a guidance for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond human perception", the Qur'an says, in effect, that it will of necessity remain a closed book to all whose minds cannot accept this fundamental premise.

4 *Ar-rizq* ("provision of sustenance") applies to all that may be benefit to man, whether it be concrete (like food, property, offspring, etc.) or abstract (like knowledge, piety, etc.). The "spending on others" is mentioned here in one breath with God-consciousness and prayer because it is precisely in such selfless acts that true piety comes to its full fruition. It should be borne in mind that the verb *anfaqa* (lit., "he spent") is always used in the Qur'an to denote spending freely on, or as a gift to, others, whatever the motive may be.

5 This is a reference to one of the fundamental doctrines of the Qur'an: the doctrine of the historical continuity of divine revelation. Life-so the Qur'an teaches us is not a series of unconnected jumps but a continuous, organic process: and this law applies also to the life of the mind, of which man's religious experience (in its cumulative sense) is a part. Thus, the religion of the Qur'an can be properly understood only against the background of the great monotheistic faiths which preceded it, and which, according to Muslim belief, culminate and achieve their final formulation in the faith of Islam.

6 In contrast with the frequently occurring term *al-kafirun* ("those who deny the truth"), the use of the past tense in *alladhina kafaru* indicates conscious intent, and is, therefore, appropriately rendered as "those who are bent on denying the truth". This interpretation is supported by many commentators, especially Zamakhshari (who, in his commentary on this verse, uses the expression, "those who have deliberately resolved upon their *kufir*"). Elsewhere in the Qur'an such people are spoken of as having "hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear" (7 : 179). For an explanation of the terms *kufir* ("denial of the truth"), *kafir* ("one who denies the truth"), etc., see note 4 on 74 : 10, where this concept appears for the first time in Qur'anic revelation.

7 A reference to the natural law instituted by God, whereby a person who persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth gradually loses the *ability* to perceive the truth, "so that finally, as it were, a seal is set upon his heart" (Raghib). Since it is God who has instituted all laws of nature- which, in their aggregate, are called *sunnat Allah* ("the way of God") this "sealing" is attributed to Him: but it is obviously a consequence of man's free choice and not an act of "predestination". Similarly, the suffering which, in the life to come, is in store for those who during their life in this world have willfully remained deaf and blind to the truth, is a natural consequence of their free choice-just as happiness in the life to come is the natural consequence of man's endeavour to attain to righteousness and inner illumination. It is in this sense that the Qur'anic references to God's "reward" and "punishment" must be understood.

(8) And there are people who say, "We do believe in God and the Last Day," the while they do not [really]. believe.

(9) They would deceive God and those who have attained to faith-the while they deceive none but themselves, and perceive it not.

(10) In their hearts is disease, and so God lets their disease increase; and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persis-tent lying.⁸

(11) And when they are told, "Do not spread corrup-tion on earth," they answer, "We are but improving things!"

(12) Oh, verily, it is they, they who are spreading corruption but they perceive it not!⁹

(13) And when they are told, "Believe as other people believe," they answer, "Shall we believe as the weak - minded believe?" Oh, verily, it is they, they who are weak - minded - but they know it not!

(14)And when they meet those who have attained to faith, they assert, "We believe [as you believe]"; but when they find themselves alone with their evil impluses,¹⁰ they say, "Verily, we are with you; we were only mocking!"

(15) God will requite them for their mockery,¹¹ and will leave them for a while in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro:

8 I.e., before God and man-and to themselves. It is generally assumed that the people to whom this passage alludes in the first instance are the hypocrites of Medina who, during the early years after the *hijrah*, outwardly professed their adherence to Islam while remaining inwardly unconvinced of the truth of Muhammad's message. However, as is always the case with Qur'anic allusions to contemporary or historical events, the above and the following verses have a general, timeless import inasmuch as they refer to all people who are prone to deceive themselves in order to evade a spiritual commitment.

9 It would seem that this is an allusion to people who oppose any "intrusion" of religious considerations into the realm of practical affairs, and thus-often unwittingly, thinking that they are "but improving things"-contribute to the moral and social confusion referred to in the subsequent verse.

10 Lit., "their satans" (*shayatin*, pl. of *shaytan*). In accordance with ancient Arabic usage, this term often denotes people "who, through their insolent persistence in evildoing (*tamarrud*), have become like satans" (Zamakhshari): an interpretation of the above verse accepted by most of the commentators. However, the term *shaytan*-which is derived from the verb *shatana*, "he was[or "became"] remote [from all that is good and true]" (*Lisan al-'Arab*, *Taj al 'Arus*)-is often used in the Qur'an to describe the "satanic" (i.e., exceedingly evil) propensities in man's own soul, and especially all impulses which run counter to truth and morality (Raghib).

11 Lit., "God will mock at them". My rendering is in conformity with the generally accepted interpretation of this phrase.

AL-BAQARAHSURAH

(16) [for] it is they who have taken error in exchange for guidance; and neither has their bargain brought them gain, nor have they found guidance [elsewhere].

(17) Their parable is that of people who kindle a fire: but as soon as it has illumined all around them, God takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see:

(18) deaf, dumb, blind- and they cannot turn back.

(19) Or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky, with utter darkness, thunder and lightning: they put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death; but God encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth.

(20) The lightning well-nigh takes away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they advance therein, and whenever darkness falls around them, they stand still.

And if God so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight:¹² for, verily, God has the power to will anything.

(21) O MANKIND! Worship your Sustainer, who has created you and those who lived before you, so that you might remain conscious of Him

(22) who has made the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy, and has sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth fruits for your sustenance: do not, then, claim that there is any power that could rival God,¹³ when you know [that He is One].

12 The obvious implication is: "but He does not will this"-that is, He does not preclude the possibility that "those who have taken error in exchange for guidance" may one day perceive the truth and mend their ways. The expression "their hearing and their sight" is obviously a metonym for man's instinctive ability to discern between good and evil and, hence, for his moral responsibility.-In the parable of the "people who kindle a fire" we have, I believe, an allusion to some people's exclusive reliance on what is termed the "scientific approach" as a means to illumine and explain all the imponderables of life and faith, and the resulting arrogant refusal to admit that anything could be beyond the reach of man's intellect. This "overweening arrogance", as the Qur'an terms it, unavoidably exposes its devotees and the society dominated by them- to the lightning of disillusion which "well-nigh takes away their sight", i.e., still further weakens their moral perception and deepens their "terror of death".

13 Lit., "do no give God any peers" (*andad*, pl. of *nidd*). There is full agreement among all commentators that this term implies any object of adoration to which some or all of God's qualities are ascribed , whether it be conceived as a deity "in its own right" or a saint supposedly possessing certain divine or semi-divine powers. This meaning can be brought out only by a free rendering of the above phrase.



Migration or hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad is a clear example of abandoning violent solutions in favour of peaceful solutions.

According to the Islamic shariah, peace is the rule in matters of jihad, while war is the least desirable option.

Countering aggression with aggression is a hard option, while countering aggression with patience and forbearance is an easier option.

The entire life of the Prophet is a practical demonstration of his peace-loving policy.